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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2008

In Today's Papers

High Court Chief: The Regime Is Not in Danger
All papers report High Court of Appeals Chairman Hasan Gerceker said at a meeting with the press Wednesday he does not think Turkey's secular system is at risk. Gerceker added any discussion to the contrary was "not timely." Gerceker also said the judiciary would implement any changes "the political will" would want in article 301 of the Turkish penal code, which makes "insulting Turkishness" a crime. "However, I don't think article 301 restricts free speech," noted Gerceker. Mainstream papers comment that Gerceker, unlike other high court members who have issued warnings on these matters in the past, refrained from commenting on "secularism" or "threats to the regime."

Gates, Cheney to Visit Turkey
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report Defense Secretary Robert Gates will pay an official visit to Turkey on February 27-28. Papers report Gates will meet with his Turkish counterpart Vecdi Gonul as well as the President, PM, and the chief of military general staff in order to discuss the fight against terror, Iraq, Iran, and Cyprus. Liberal Radikal and mainstream Sabah claim Gates will ask Turkey to give "active military support" to the fight against terror in Afghanistan.

Papers also report US Vice-President Dick Cheney is expected to visit Turkey in March. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet expects Cheney to ask Turkey to contribute an additional 2,000 troops to the peacekeeping force in Afghanistan. Radikal reminds Turkey had earlier turned down troop demands for the high-risk zone in Afghanistan. The paper comments whether the US-Turkey cooperation in combating the PKK would lead to a change in Turkey's position in Afghanistan.

Turkey- US Summit on Terrorist Extradition
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Taraf, Zaman and others report Justice Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin said Turkey was planning to hold a symposium in March in Istanbul to discuss extradition of

terror suspects. Mainstream Milliyet reports that during his visit to Turkey last week, US Attorney General Michael Mukasey offered to arrange a round-table meeting of Turkish and US specialists to discuss extradition issues. Sahin reportedly told Mukasey there were no problems in extradition of criminals between Turkey and the US, but added that EU countries used to decline Turkish extradition requests. Sahin, therefore, offered to invite EU countries such as Belgium and France which Turkey experiences problems regarding the extradition of terrorists.

AKP Carries the Constitutional Draft to the US
Mainstream Milliyet reports that AKP Vice Chairman Dengir Mir Firat, Constitutional Amendment Committee chairman Prof. Ergun Ozbudun and AKP Mardin deputy Cuneyt Yuksel will go to the US to attend a conference at Colombia University on March 3 to discuss the new constitution draft. Reportedly, one of the sponsors of the conference is Turkish Cultural Center which is known to be close to Fethullah Gulen.

Parliament Adopts New Foundations Law
Sabah, Turkiye, Milliyet, Hurriyet, Radikal, Yeni Safak and others: The Turkish Parliament adopted the new foundations law yesterday. The opposition parties MHP and CHP voted against it, but nevertheless, the law was passed by 242 votes in favor and 72 against. The new law allows foreigners to establish new foundations in Turkey on the principle of legal and actual reciprocity. Conservative-nationalist Turkiye notes that foundations will also be able to establish economic enterprises and companies on the condition they notify Turkey's foundation authority. Foundations will be able to acquire assets and use them at their will.

PM Erdogan Urges Turkish Ambassadors to Stay Committed in EU Bid

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Radikal, Yeni Safak, Sabah, Hurriyet, Milliyet and others: Prime Minister Erdogan hosted a luncheon for a group of Turkish Ambassadors who were recently appointed to their new missions abroad. PM Erdogan voiced strong commitment for Turkey's EU accession and urged the ambassadors to fight against efforts aiming to divert Turkey's efforts to join the EU. Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak describes the PM's words as a call for mobilization in the EU accession process.

Editorial Commentary on Pakistan, Armenia

"Pakistan's Democracy Test"
Sami Kohen wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "The most important aspect of the Pakistani elections is that they took place in a free and orderly fashion. Thus, Pakistan has gained significant ground regarding democracy. The election results are a clear indication of the people's demand for democracy and change. This opens a new page in Pakistan's political history. This is going to be a challenging period of transition in Pakistan. Under normal conditions, a president and an opposition-led government can work in harmony. But Pakistan does not have that type of political and democratic maturity yet. Given the challenges that Pakistan is going through, all of the political powers are required to work toward consensus versus polarization. In the coming days, Pakistan will show the extent to which it is ready to digest the essence of democracy."

"Conditions Will Force Sarkisian Toward Pragmatism"
Semih Idiz wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "What are the possible outcomes of the Sarkisian era? Given the grave economic challenges that Armenia is facing, the country's priority must be the economy and not the genocide issue. Sarkisian also is aware of the fact that the continuation of Karabakh issue harms more Armenians than Azerbaijanis. Indeed this issue, rather than genocide issue, is the main reason for Turkey's political and economic embargo against Armenia. Sarkisian will have to take some pragmatic steps regarding Karabakh, if only for the sake of the Armenian economy. Speaking with Armenian officials here in Yerevan, it is obvious that they are waiting for Turkey take the first step toward dialogue. Once this happens, it is expected that the Diaspora will also soften its attitude toward Ankara. Turkey, on the other hand, does not want to harm its relations with Azerbaijan and does not want to appear to take initiative while Armenia remains on Azeri territories. In

other words, Ankara expects Armenia to take the first step towards dialogue. One thing is for certain: given the current circumstances, Sarkisian will have to be more pragmatic now than ever before."

TV Highlights
NTV

Domestic News

- A group of students rallied yesterday in Ankara's Middle East Technical University to protest against constitutional reforms freeing the headscarf in universities.
- Turkey's National Security Council (MGK) is to hold a meeting Thursday chaired by President Abdullah Gul to discuss the PKK, Kirkuk, and headscarf reforms.
- Finance Minister Kemal Unakitan said in 2008, foreign capital amounting to USD 10 billion will be injected into Turkey even if there is no further privatization.
- The Health Ministry has banned the use of cameras in hospitals due to concerns over patients' privacy.

International News

- The Turkish parliamentary commission for human rights visiting

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Germany warned that arson attacks targeting Turks may escalate tensions.

- Foreign Minister Babacan, in Moscow, said his statement about a possible Turkish ground operation into northern Iraq was "nothing new." Babacan added Turkey has no hidden agenda in Iraq.
- The Turkish Cyprus government has prepared a bill which would allow Greek Cypriots to sell their properties located in the north of the island.
- Iranian President Ahmadinejad called Israel a "filthy bacteria" whose sole purpose was to oppress the other nations of the region.
- Mainstream Milliyet reports students at Middle East Technical University protested the headscarf reforms yesterday. The photo taken at the site shows a student demonstrator carrying a sign depicting Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan covered in a headscarf that appears to be an American flag.

WILSON